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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING: DOING BETTER ON PROSECUTION AND PUNISHMENT

REF: YEREVAN 2051

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) A strictly pro-governmental newspaper reflected a positive shift in the approach towards the issue of trafficking that has occurred in the Prosecutor's office in recent months. In November the Prosecutor's office registered the first case of domestic trafficking in Armenia. Also in November the court ruled on two trafficking cases, sentencing the defendants to prison terms ranging from two years to four years and ten months. The Prosecutor's office has appealed the verdict of one of these cases, considering it too lenient. Several more cases charging violation of Criminal Code Article 132 on Trafficking are still in progress. The Prosecutor's office has finished the investigation of the Ukrainian trafficking case (reftel) and sent the case to the court with an indictment on charges of Article 132. End Summary.

FIRST DOMESTIC TRAFFICKING CASE

2. (SBU) On November 30 the local pro-government newspaper "Hayots Ashkhar" reported on the first case of domestic trafficking registered in Armenia. The Prosecutor General's Office initiated the case on November 9, 2005, on charges of Article 132.2 (Trafficking with aggravating circumstances) of the Criminal Code against Vahe Aleksanyan, who had forced the victim Ani Mkrtchyan into prostitution. Ani Mkrtchyan went to the police for help after two years of physical abuse and threats. The court started hearing this case on December 12.

PRO-GOVERNMENT MEDIA TALKS TIP

3. (SBU) "Hayots Ashkhar" is the only print outlet that gets routine access to the criminal case materials from the Prosecutor General's Office and it presents those cases with the Prosecutor General's interpretations. Up until this past summer, Hayots Ashkhar portrayed trafficking as absent in Armenia, and claimed that the trafficking issue was raised by NGOs solely to receive grant money. Currently this newspaper, reflecting the shift of opinion within the Prosecutor's office, reports on any case that is remotely connected with prostitution as trafficking.

COURT CONTINUES TO IMPOSE LIGHT SENTENCES

4. (SBU) On November 11 the first instance court of Etchmiadzin (a small town near Yerevan) imposed prison sentences on a group of traffickers who were transporting women via Moscow to Dubai to engage in prostitution. The case involved two victims, Shashinga Mkrtchyan and Ruzanna Kyureghyan, to whom the traffickers had promised jobs as a waitress and a nanny. In Dubai the victims were forced to engage in prostitution for more than a year and were eventually caught and deported by local authorities. Three of the defendants, Simon Nersisyan, Patvakan Malkhasyan and Tamara Makarovo, were sentenced to two years of imprisonment each, and Nanasil Arakelyan to four years and ten months. This group had worked for Anahit Malkhasyan, an infamous pimp in Dubai, who died recently in a car accident. The boyfriend of Anahit Malkhasyan, Avetis Kiziryan, together with his accomplice Gayane Mirzoyan (currently wanted on outstanding Armenian criminal warrants) have also been

charged with trafficking (Article 132) under a separate criminal case currently in progress.

15. (SBU) The Prosecutor's office agreed with the Association of the Investigative Journalists (AIJ) who monitored the trial that the sentences were too lenient; Armen Boshnaghyan from the Anti-Trafficking Special Unit of the Prosecutor's office told us that they have already asked the court of appeals to review the punishments and make them tougher.

DESTINATION COUNTRY - TURKEY

16. (SBU) On November 24 the first instance court in Vanadzor (third largest city in Armenia) sentenced Ruzanna Movsisyan to four years of imprisonment on trafficking charges. The defendant was an Armenian prostitute who worked in Konya, Turkey. Her Turkish bosses, Murat and Arzu, allegedly used her to recruit Armenian women for the Turkish sex market. Movsisyan lured an acquaintance from Vanadzor with a promise of a high-paying job, getting her to travel to Turkey (by bus). The victim was forced to engage in prostitution for 20 days in order to repay the debt and was released only after promising to recruit additional women for the traffickers.

17. (SBU) In the summer of 2005 the Prosecutor's office opened another case under Article 132 in which the destination country was Turkey; the case was postponed, however, until the trafficker, Eliza Mkrtchyan, could be found. According to a recent study conducted by the Audio Visual Reporters NGO there are "numerous" women from Vanadzor who travel to Turkey by buses everyday and eventually become victims of trafficking. According to preliminary observations of AIJ there are currently more Armenian women in Turkey involved in the sex trade than in Dubai.

UKRAINIAN TIP CASE - UPDATE

18. (SBU) In early December the Prosecutor's office finished the investigation of the case that involved Ukrainian victims (reftel) that were trafficked to Armenia. On December 6 the GPO sent the case against the defendant Sos Meliksetyan to the court on charges of Article 132 with aggravating circumstances. Hope and Help NGO which sheltered the Ukrainian victims flew them back to Kiev on December 4. We expect a final verdict in this case in January 2006.

GODFREY